R E P O R T R E S U M E S

ED 016 542 RC 002 024

THE LANGUAGE AND READING EDUCATION PROGRAM OF THE SOUTHWEST EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT LABORATORY.

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PUB DATE 4 JUL 67

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.25 HC-$0.32 6P.

DESCRIPTORS- *CULTURE, CULTURAL DIFFERENCES, *DISADVANTAGED YOUTH, EDUCATIONALLY DISADVANTAGED, ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED, LANGUAGE HANDICAPS, LANGUAGE ARTS, *LANGUAGE, LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT, LANGUAGE FLUENCY, LANGUAGE SKILLS, MOBILITY, MINORITY GROUPS, MEXICAN AMERICANS, NEGROES, READING, *SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING, SOCIAL DISADVANTAGEMENT,

THE BASIC CONCEPTS USED IN DEVELOPING THE LANGUAGE AND READING EDUCATION PROGRAM WERE--(1) ALL HUMAN ORGANISMS ARE ESSENTIALLY ALIKE AND THEREFORE MAN'S BASIC NEEDS ARE THE SAME, (2) FUNDAMENTAL LIKENESSES EXIST IN ALL CULTURES, (3) CHILDREN FIRST INTRODUCED TO THE DIMENSIONS OF THEIR OWN CULTURE ARE READY TO MOVE TOWARD UNDERSTANDING THE OTHER CULTURES, AND (4) LANGUAGE IS A SPECIAL WAY OF LOOKING AT THE WORK AND COMMUNICATING THIS WORLD TO OTHERS. MATERIALS FOR THIS PROGRAM ARE TO BE ESPECIALLY DESIGNED TO ATTACK THE LANGUAGE PROBLEMS OF LINGUISTICALLY HANDICAPPED CHILDREN OF THE SOUTHWEST. BY FOCUSING ATTENTION ON SPECIFIC GROUPS WHO SUFFER THE MOST IN TERMS OF LANGUAGE DEPRIVATION, IT HAS BEEN POSSIBLE TO IDENTIFY THE LINGUISTIC CHARACTERISTICS WHICH CAUSE LEARNING DIFFICULTIES. IN ORDER TO EVALUATE THIS PROGRAM, THE FOLLOWING AREAS ARE PROPOSED AS BASES FOR FORMULATING HYPOTHESES WHICH WILL BE TESTED LATER--(1) PRIMACY OF ORAL LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT, (2) MEANINGFUL CONTENT, (3) LANGUAGE SKILLS, AND (4) CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING. THIS SPEECH WAS DELIVERED AT A WORKING CONFERENCE ON RESEARCH AND ACTIVITY IN THE LANGUAGE ARTS FOR THE PRE-PRIMARY/PRIMARY CULTURALLY DIVERSE NON-ENGLISH SPEAKING CHILD, ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO, JUNE 4-6, 1967. (ES)

ED016542

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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The Language and Reading Education Program of the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory

Dr. Elizabeth Ott

A Paper Presented at a Conference on
Research and Activity in the Language Arts
for the
Pre-Primary/Primary Culturally Diverse
Non-English Speaking Child

Held in
Albuquerque, N. Mex.
June 4-5-6, 1967

Sponsored By
The Southwestern Cooperative Educational Laboratory, Inc.

ED 016 027

THE LANGUAGE AND READING EDUCATION PROGRAM OF THE SOUTHWEST EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT LABORATORY

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Since language is one of the most important elements of a culture, facility in using language arts and skills is one of the most dynamic pathways for bringing about understanding between various cultural and ethnic groups. The Program for Language and Reading and its relevance to Laboratory focus is evidenced by the following basic ideas which are primary to development of the program content:

--All human organisms are essentially alike and therefore man's basic needs are the same.

--These fundamental likenesses exist in all cultures.

--Language is a special way of looking at the world and communicating this world to others.

--Children first introduced to the dimensions of their own culture are ready to move toward understanding the other cultures.

Program materials are to be especially designed to attack the language problems of these particular groups in the Southwest region:

1. The children of Spanish-speaking background

2. The children of French-speaking background

3. The children of non-standard dialect background

To provide self-understanding through acceptance and to establish an avenue for upward mobility, the foci of the program are:

1. Development of thinking skills in harmony with cognitive style of the learner (sensory modalities, reinforcement systems, etc.)

2. Refinement of the native language for children of non-English-speaking backgrounds

3. Command of a standard of English acceptable to the leadership group of the local community

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4. Facility in using language, including hearing and speaking, and reading and writing with clarity of meaning and precision of expression

Without sufficient and adequate communication systems between socio-economic and ethnic cultures, very little understanding can be developed. Understanding and acceptance can be directly brought about through the Language and Reading Education Program.

Realistic problems in educating the youth who are linguistically handicapped are essentially:

Language Facility: Children who enter first grade knowing little or no English or who use a non-standard English dialect are seriously disadvantaged, as evidenced by their inability to advance in school at the expected rate of achievement set by the middle-class English-speaking culture. In this region, the rate of failure in the typical school program of Spanish-speaking first graders has been over 80%. These children are disadvantaged linguistically, socially, economically and, therefore, academically. Primary to their inability to succeed in the educational program is their inability to speak and understand a form of English acceptable in the school setting. Because of this underdevelopment in oral language, the superimposing of the complex task of reading the language has met with phenomenal failure and its accompanying catastrophic losses in human resources.

Symbol Systems: In the Southwest, school programs composed primarily of work with abstract symbols have multiplied the problems of all children, but have been particularly detrimental to Mexican-American, French-Cajun and Negro ethnic groups, where children at six years of age are thrust into a school program in which they are forced to start at the abstract level of a relatively new language, the reading and writing of English.

Content: One of the critical areas in elementary education today is that of determining and designing the content of programs for all elementary children, and particularly, for children who are educationally disadvantaged. Programs for elementary school children have emphasized symbolic learning--reading, writing, spelling--often without too much concern for the meanings of such symbols. Probing questions about cognition, learning behavior, and the structure of knowledge itself have resulted in increased concern about what the content of elementary school programs should be. Basic concepts from the varied fields of knowledges, or disciplines, should have their beginnings in the school experience of even the youngest children in order to serve as "vectors" in designing their school programs.

Materials for Learning: A corollary of an elementary school program in which the emphasis is upon symbols or abstractions is that equipment which enables children to utilize their best ways of learning, equipment rarely available except out on the "growing edge" in elementary education, is not

available. Traditionally, books comprised the major part of the media for teaching. Children also need concrete experiences with appropriate realia through which thinking is clarified and organized.

The Language and Reading Program will provide solutions to these problems in the following ways:

1. Provide, through the medium of English as a second language, a rich intercultural environment for effectively educating disadvantaged youth

2. In areas serving non-English-speaking populations and where feasible, provide a bilingual program which will further develop and refine the native language along with English as a second language

3. Design, demonstrate, and evaluate a program for elementary grades in which the content is structured around representative ideas from the subject disciplines and the intellectural processes inherent in them

4. Prepare and demonstrate materials designed to assist children in learning the linguistic symbol system that will emanate from the program content

5. Develop a high degree of teacher competency in the teaching of reading and related language skills.

The Program, by focusing attention on the specific groups in the region who suffer the most in terms of language deprivation, has identified the particular linguistic characteristics which cause learning difficulties, economic poverty and social isolation. Attention is given to planning an instructional program in keeping with these special peculiarities and forcefully directing content, methodology and supporting materials developed through a systems approach. The program is designed to provide:

1. Content based on universal values, so that goals, habits, customs, language and other aspects of culture are seen as commonalities of all people and are understood in the historical, anthropological, and geographical dimensions.

2. Organization to insure systematic development, refinement, and reinforcement of concepts, broad cognitive patterns, and linguistic skills all interlocked in a planned program which has depth and feeds directly into the content structure necessary for academic success.

3. A learning environment in which each pupil is given opportunities to demonstrate and apply his learning in a variety of situations and to use this learning to acquire and relate new knowledge and skills.

4. Through daily experiences and success-oriented models, nourishment of the self-image into a strong personal identity having worth as an individual and as a contributing member of the larger society.

5. Specific training for further achievement through helping the child to:

   (a) organize and classify his experiences
   (b) perceive selectively (or tune out irrelevant noises and distractions) for the task at hand
   (c) generalize his experiences
   (d) understand various abstract relationships, e.g., cause and effect, and the concepts of time and space
   (e) verbalize and communicate the above, using acceptable language and speech patterns
   (f) in keeping with his expected developmental and achievement levels, read skillfully to understand the writings of others and express his own ideas in a clear, logical manner, using acceptable written forms of the language

6. Continuous and intensive professional development of staff, both teachers and administrators, including the specialized techniques for language development and the skills for individualizing the instructional program for particular class groups and pupils.

7. Fresh vigor to all aspects of the program through appropriate modifications and changes as these needs are indicated by pupil progress reports and the "feedback loop."

8. Leadership in the professional field by recognizing particular teaching skills and innovative practices as these are evidenced through pupil successes.

In order to establish base lines for effectively measuring and evaluating this programmatic effort, the following hypotheses are stated:

1. Primacy of Oral Language Development. If children from subculture groups are introduced to standard English through

meanings derived from concrete experiences accompanied by precise language for concept development, audio-lingual methodology will prove valuable in accelerating the learning of this language.

2. Meaningful Content. If content of the language program is drawn directly from meanings and basic structure of the content fields, the dichotomy which presently exists in "traditional" reading materials between sterile fiction confined to highly restricted vocabulary and the task of reading and understanding conceptually loaded expository material will not exist.

3. Language Skills. If the skills of linguistic decoding (listening and reading) and encoding (speaking and writing) are learned through such expository material, emphasis on syntactical and phonic approaches will prove highly effective in terms of conservation of teacher-pupil time and effort and evidenced by pupil achievement gains.

4. Cultural Understanding. If a child is given an understanding and appreciation of himself and his own culture, the cultural differences of others are accepted and given perspective. Through a structured program providing intellectual engagement with important ideas, the child learns that it is on the higher planes of mental activity that men may come to know true equality.